



ALCEDONE AZURRA.

ALCYONE AZUREA.

Azure Kingsfisher.

Alcedo azurea, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. xxxii.—Lewin, Birds of New Holl., pl. 1.—Swains. Zool. Ill., pl. 26.

Alcedo tribrachys, Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 681.—Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit., p. lxxxviii.

Tri-digitated Kingsfisher, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. viii. p. 105.

Azure Kingsfisher, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. Add., p. 372.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. iv. p. 61.

Ceyx azurea, Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. ii. pl. 55. fig. 1.—Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 208.

Alcyone Australis, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 336.

Ceyx cyanea, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 241.—Ib. Man. d'Orn., tom. ii. p. 96.

Alcyone azurea, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd edit. p. 14.

WITH the exception of Swan River, every colony of Australia, from Port Essington on the north-west to Van Diemen's Land in the extreme south, is inhabited by Azure Kingsfishers ; but as they, although closely allied, constitute at least three species, the present page must necessarily treat exclusively of the one that inhabits New South Wales and South Australia, over the whole of which countries it is dispersed, wherever brooks, ponds and other waters occur suitable to its habits and mode of life. In size and in the brilliancy of its plumage, the Azure Kingsfisher is intermediate between the species inhabiting the north coast and that found in Van Diemen's Land ; although generically distinct from the Kingsfisher of Europe (*Alcedo Ispida*), it has many characters in common with that bird. It subsists almost exclusively on small fish and aquatic insects, which it captures in the water by darting down from some bare branch overhanging the stream, and to which it generally returns to kill and devour its prey, which is swallowed entire and head foremost, after the manner of the little favourite of our own island. It is a solitary bird, a pair, and frequently only one, being found at the same spot. During the breeding-season it becomes querulous and active, and even pugnacious if any intruder of the same species should venture within the precincts of its abode. The males at this season have great confidence, and chase each other up and down the stream with arrow-like quickness, the rich azure-blue of the back glittering in the sun, and appearing more like a meteor as it darts by the spectator than a bird. The task of incubation commences in August and terminates in January, during which period two broods are frequently brought forth. The eggs, which are of a beautiful pearly or pinkish white and rather round in form, are deposited at the extremity of a hole, in a perpendicular or shelving bank bordering the stream, without any nest being made for their reception ; they are from five to seven in number, three quarters of an inch broad by seven-eighths of an inch long. The young at the first moult assume the plumage of the adult, which is never afterwards changed. The hole occupied by the bird is frequently almost filled up with the bones of small fish, which are discharged from the throat and piled up round the young in the form of a nest. Immediately on leaving their holes the young follow the parents from one part of the brook to another, and are fed by them while resting on some stone or branch near the water's edge ; they soon, however, become able to obtain their own food, and may be observed at a very early age plunging into the water to a considerable depth to capture small fish and insects.

The sexes are precisely similar in the colouring of their plumage, neither do they differ in size. The young are very clamorous, frequently uttering their twittering cry as their parents pass and re-pass the branch on which they are sitting.

All the upper surface and a patch on each side of the chest fine ultramarine blue, becoming more vivid on the rump and upper tail-coverts ; on each side of the neck behind the ear-coverts a tuft of yellowish white feathers ; wings black ; throat white, slightly washed with buff ; all the under surface, including the under side of the wing, ferruginous orange, the flanks tinged with bluish lilac, giving them a rich purple hue ; line from the bill to the eye reddish orange ; irides and bill black ; feet orange.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size.